1: Delobsom--161 I-5 (no date) 1933 FA28 Mossi FA28

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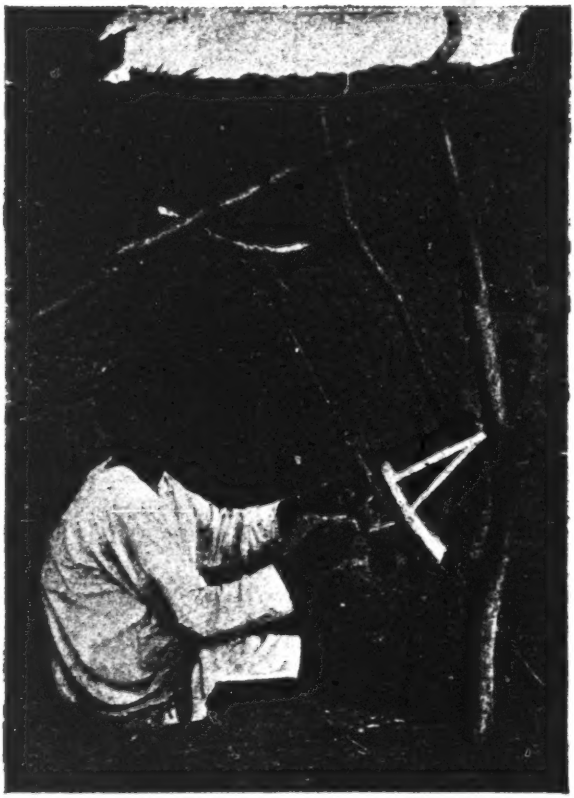

Mossi Weaver.

From the Mission of the White Fathers at Ouagadougou.

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Above: Inside a Soukala. Above: The Occupants of a Soukala.
Middle: Load-bearers. Middle: Weaver.
Below: Marketplace.

443 rice, beans, karite butter, roasted peanuts sold in little heaps for one centime, raw peanuts, and all the spices for the sauce. Yarsé or Haoussa girls walk from group to group with small basins full of kola nuts, and chiefs and rich men buy one or two nuts which they usually share with their followers. Foreign traders sit under shelters of foliage or millet stalks and sell a few pearls, salt or copper bars, henna or blue dye, while bald-headed vultures hovering above the butchers point out their location to everyone. The meat on sale consists of a goat or sheep, sometimes a beef found dead in the bush or more rarely one slaughtered especially for the occasion. Some people bring chicks and occasionally a hen. This is about all that is to be found.

443 To these comestibles drink must be added. The women who sell
273 millet beer occupy a whole section of the market, and this section is not the least frequented nor the quietest spot. While butchers may be located by watching the vultures, it is possible to spot the tavern-keepers merely by cocking one's ears. Their presence is revealed by the cries, the beating of drums, the hubbub inevitably connected with a crowd slightly the worse for drink. The Mossi undoubtedly drink a lot of millet beer, but the beverage sold at the marketplace does not easily go to the head. The beer that is boiled again (tēsé /sic/) is far more dangerous with its rather high percentage of alcohol, and hydromel (bésé) is even more so. The latter is made of honey and millet flour boiled in water, to which barm is added to induce fermentation. These two beverages are truly potent, especially when drunk
[579] alternately. This is why brawls occur rather frequently, and sometimes real battles in which people are wounded. These are drunkards' quarrels. Men are indeed the same everywhere, and how many fairs without a drunk or two are to be found in our own country? It must be said, however, that more intoxicated natives are to be met with in Mossi country than in France.

443 The market begins at about ten o'clock and usually closes at two; the important ones open around noon and last until nightfall. When we discuss the industries, we shall mention the other products which are sold there.

283 Weaving is the most widespread industry, the one that all men may
● 284 practice and all do practice to some extent. The cotton is ginned,
462 and the thread prepared by the women. Delafosse, in his work on the Siéna, has described the process accurately: "When the cotton has been separated from the husk, the seeds are removed with an iron rod

283 which is rolled with both hands on the boll lying on a flat stone; /55/ the seeds are thus driven forward and picked up by hand... The cotton is coiled around a wooden rod which the woman holds in her left hand; with her right hand she grasps and stretches a strand of cotton from the distaff and winds it around the upper tip of a wooden needle, which bears at its lower end a sort of heavy clay ball and which is caused to spin rapidly, like a top, on the bottom of a wooden dish by the motion of the right hand. Extended between the left hand which holds the distaff and the right hand which secures and spins the top, the cotton stretches and becomes thread, which coils around the needle of the top... The thread is later uncoiled, then wound again around a wooden rod to make a thick cylindro-conical ball. When the thread is to be used for weaving, it is stretched around four stakes set in the ground in the shape of a very elongated quadrilateral." (2)

2. Delafosse, Le peuple Siena /The Siena People/, p. 58.

●286 All the young men learn how to weave; it is part of their education. The loom, like the spindle described above, is the kind used by all the Negroes of West Africa, and it is described by Delafosse as follows: "The slat loom is suspended from a piece of wood resting on two forked stakes; the shuttle is canoe-shaped and hollow; the treadled lever permits alternate crossing of the two rows of slats /heddles/; the threads are stretched by means of a large stone resting on the ground in front of the weaver who sits on a crude stool placed behind the trestle which supports the loom (here usually the weaver sits on the ground), so that his feet come to rest on the pedals. This apparatus is usually set up in the shade of the large trees which stand on the village grounds, or else under shelters of foliage built especially for the purpose. The cotton fabric is woven in strips 10 to 15 centimeters wide; several of them are sewn together to reach the width required for breechcloths and garments." (3)

3. Ibid., p. 59.

The fabric strips are not always solid in color. Often the warp consists of threads dyed red or dark blue and mixed with white strands, [53] while the woof is white. Some people know how to make strips with small blue or red checks which are quite attractive. All weavers are

286 not equally skillful, but some of them know how to weave cloth which is fine, tightly woven, and quite strong. Sewn together and cut according to unchanging patterns, these strips are made into breechcloths, trousers, wide shirts, full robes which cover the whole body, and especially men's and women's blankets, white or dark blue, which are an indispensable protection against the cold and which are worn wrapped around the body. Mossi fabrics are quite well-known in neighboring territories, and as we shall see they are an important trade item.

386 It is customary to dye the garments after they are made or the thread before it is woven. The dyer's trade is quite widespread in Mossi country, and there is no important /56/ village without dyers. They get together to dig their wells in the same spot; often choosing a small hillock for the purpose where they sink about ten wells, two or three meters deep, the inner surface baked with a charcoal fire. The dyeing solutions are poured into these wells, and the clothes or thread to be dyed are immersed in the liquid and stirred with sticks that have at the end pieces of wood set in the shape of a cross. Fabrics are left soaking for varying periods of time depending on their bulk, and then they are spread out in the sun to dry. The colors obtained vary from a very dark blue, nearly black, to light blue. Certain clothes are dyed sienna, a color favored by hunters because it is dark. Several washings are needed to remove the strong odor which permeates cloth dyed in this fashion, but each washing removes part of the dye.

285 Everyone knows how to weave, and almost everyone knows how to make basketry. When the grass is full grown, the children have fun making straw hats, some of which are not badly done; others make containers in various patterns by mixing yellow and black straws, and red ones dyed with the leaves of a variety of millet, cultivated in order to obtain the red shade desired for coloring leather; yet others plait simple trays of straw which are used to cover the gourds or to carry meat.

294 Those who are skillful make sturdy hats adorned with leather figures, and this becomes a veritable industry. There are two main kinds of hats: those shaped like pointed cones, and the bell-shaped hats with a wide brim. They are so ample that they can easily be worn over a cap which is sometimes wrapped in a strip of soft fabric. A leather [284] strap with a sliding knot holds the hat in place or permits it to hang down one's back with the cord holding it at the neck. Saponé is the manufacturing center for hats.

282 294 435 and needles are made by blacksmiths. A strike-a-light steel is worth 200 cowries.

5. They make sheaths for knives and swords. Knife sheaths are worth 200 cowries, sword sheaths 3,000.

6. Bridles and saddles. Saddles are worth 3,000 cowries, bridles 5,000.

Shoemakers also work with deerskin and leopardskin. They adorn Mossi truncheons or clubs with leopardskin. They also adorn spears with it. The leopardskin is provided by the customer. The shoemaker does not purchase it directly.

Leopardskin is sold at market in small pieces worth 100 cowries. A large leopardskin is worth 10 francs, a small one 7 francs.

Crocodile skin is also used by shoemakers. People who have killed a crocodile go and sell its skin at market, or else someone purchases the skin from the hunter and retails it at market. The skin of a small crocodile (hardly any but these are to be found in Mossi territory, owing to the scarcity of water) is worth 1,000 cowries. People who wish the shoemaker to work one of these skins purchase it at market and take it to him.

282 294 There are no hippopotamus skins in Mossi territory, because water is scarce and watercourses are small. As for elephant skin, it is too tough to be worked and remains unused.

282 294 241 The shoemaker I am describing exercises his trade only during the dry season. During the rainy season he tills the soil, and this nets him more than his trade. /532/ The same thing applies, incidentally, to all Mossi shoemakers. During the winter season, our man cultivates a field of small millet and one of large red millet, a small rice field, and a little maize around his soukala. He plants beans in his two millet fields. He owns neither large nor small livestock, not even a chicken or a dog.

There are no makers of headcrests among the Mossi, and the Boussouma chief I questioned about it told me there never were any.

286 Let us now proceed to the cotton industry, and study in turn the weaver's, tailor's and dyer's trades.

The Mossi weaver (soulouga) is a weaver-cultivator. He tills the soil during the rainy season and exercises his trade during the dry season. In fact he is primarily a cultivator, for cultivation rather than weaving comes first and foremost to him.

286 There may be five weaver-cultivators in a small village, or fifteen in a large one.

286 283 Customers bring the weaver the cotton thread spun by their wives, for spinning is a family affair. The women spread out the tufts of raw cotton on a small board and extract the seeds by pressing upon them. Then they spin small quantities of cotton between their fingers and thus make it into threads which they coil around a twig. The threads are handed to the weaver in this form.

286 The weaver uncoils the threads and sets them on his loom, which is very primitive. It is the same one used throughout West Africa, and it is called niri in Mossi. The cotton strips are usually from 8 to 10 centimeters wide. Their length, which is quite variable, may reach 50 meters. The weaver makes his loom himself.

Let us present an Ouagadougou weaver, Beïdou Ninkéma, the head of a soukala. He has two wives and no children. He tills the soil during the rainy season and weaves during the dry season. His fields net him more than his trade, because the Yarsé also work at the weaver's trade, and since they are more skillful at it than the Mossi their competition is formidable. /533/ The customers bring him thread, and he makes it into cotton strips. He is paid 500 [435] cowries to make the strips needed for a skirt. Sixty strips are needed to make one skirt.

[294] Our weaver is also a tailor, but only on occasion, and incidentally a tailor of the lowest order for he can only make skirts and cloaks. [435] He cannot make trousers. He makes a cloak for 0.50 franc, a skirt for 0.20 franc, with the fabric supplied, of course.

286 857 291 Let us add that child-weavers are also to be found among the Mossi. They make pétala.

"Pétala," says the Cahier des Rapports of the circle /of Ouagadougou/, "are small, very narrow strips, from 10 to 25 millimeters wide, made of multicolored threads, yellow, red, blue, green, etc., dyed in the territory and woven by children on simplified looms.

"Those strips, which are very strong, are used as trouser belts.

[935] "Pétala is worth a little under 0.10 franc a meter, and its sale nets a small profit to the children who make it and who sell it themselves on Mossi markets.

286 291 "This kind of braiding is not exported."

294 563 There are tailors as well as weavers among the Mossi. The tailor's trade, incidentally, is exercised in Mossi lands not only by the Mossi but also by the Yarsé and by some of the Haoussa who are settled in the territory.

294 Mossi tailors till the soil during the winter season and work as tailors during the dry season. Their fields net them more than their trade.

Most Mossi tailors do custom work. Cotton strips are brought to them, and they sew them into the required garment. Others purchase cotton strips, make them into various garments (skirts, cloaks, trousers, caps) and have their wives sell them at market. Those, however, are in the minority.

A cloak is called fougou in Mossi, a skirt fougoupoko from poko, "woman" and fougou, "cloak." Trousers are called koulouga.

/534/ Let us add that garment manufacture has remained a family industry in much of Mossi territory. Many Mossi can sew, and they make their own clothes by sewing up cotton strips. Let [462] us note here that as in nearly all of West Africa, it is the men who sew rather than the women. In this area of Africa, indeed, sewing is essentially a male occupation rather than a female one.

Now to present a Ouagadougou tailor, Mohammadi Bagaré.

He tills the soil and does nothing else during the winter season. He exercises his tailor's trade during the dry season.

He does custom work. Those who want a garment bring him cotton strips in sufficient numbers, and he makes the requested gar- [435] ment. He asks 1,000 cowries to make a large cloak, 500 for a small one, 200 for a skirt. To make a cap he asks only for one kola nut, which is worth 50 cowries at Ouagadougou. He takes 200 cowries for a pair of trousers.

It takes him five days' work to make a large cloak, two days for a small one, one day for a skirt, two days for a pair of trousers, one hour for a cap.

[412 431] His only working tool is the needle. Mohammadi uses European needles.

386 at the bottom of the hole. A loaf of indigo is added, and then water. The ingredients are left to blend for three days, and then the thread, strips, etc., may be immersed.

The coloring mixture is replaced every twenty days. It leaves at the bottom of the dyeing well a sort of yellow-grey crust which is removed and allowed to dry in the sun. Once dry, it /536/ is reduced to powder and added to the next mixture.

Cotton threads, in order to be dyed, are immersed in the mixture and crumpled with the fingers. At nighttime they are removed and left to dry on the hut roof. The dyeing is resumed on the morrow. At the end of three days, the threads are black. Only two days are needed to obtain dark-blue threads, and one day is sufficient for light-blue threads. The same applies to cotton strips and garments.

Our dyer does not exercise his trade during the winter season. At that time, he undertakes nothing but cultivation. It is during the dry season that he is a dyer. He claims, however, that his trade nets him more than his fields.

386 435 To dye cotton threads he asks 200 cowries to dye a bundle black, from 60 to 100 to dye it dark blue, or 50 cowries to dye it light blue.

When he buys a cloak to dye it (he buys it for 1,500 cowries, for example) he resells it dyed black for 3,000 cowries, dark blue for 2,000, or light blue for 1,700.

286 435 Mossi fabrics are as follows:

1. White or off-white fabric, undyed. It is called pempéla. It is worth 25 cowries a cubit, that is, the length from the elbow to the tip of the fingers.

2. The white fabric with blue strips called nakoré. It is made of white threads and threads dyed blue. It is worth 50 cowries a cubit.

3. The fabric with small blue and white checks called arkilla. It is worth 50 cowries a cubit.

4. The dark-blue fabric with scattered white stripes. It is called ganga, and it is worth 50 cowries a cubit.

5. Finally, the blue fabric with blue and white stripes called oulambala or oulambalé, which costs 75 cowries or one sou and a half a cubit.